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(54) **VEHICLE BODY STRUCTURE**

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B60R 19/52 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **B62D 25/12** (2013.01); **B60R 19/52**
(2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC B62D 25/12; B60R 19/52
See application file for complete search history.

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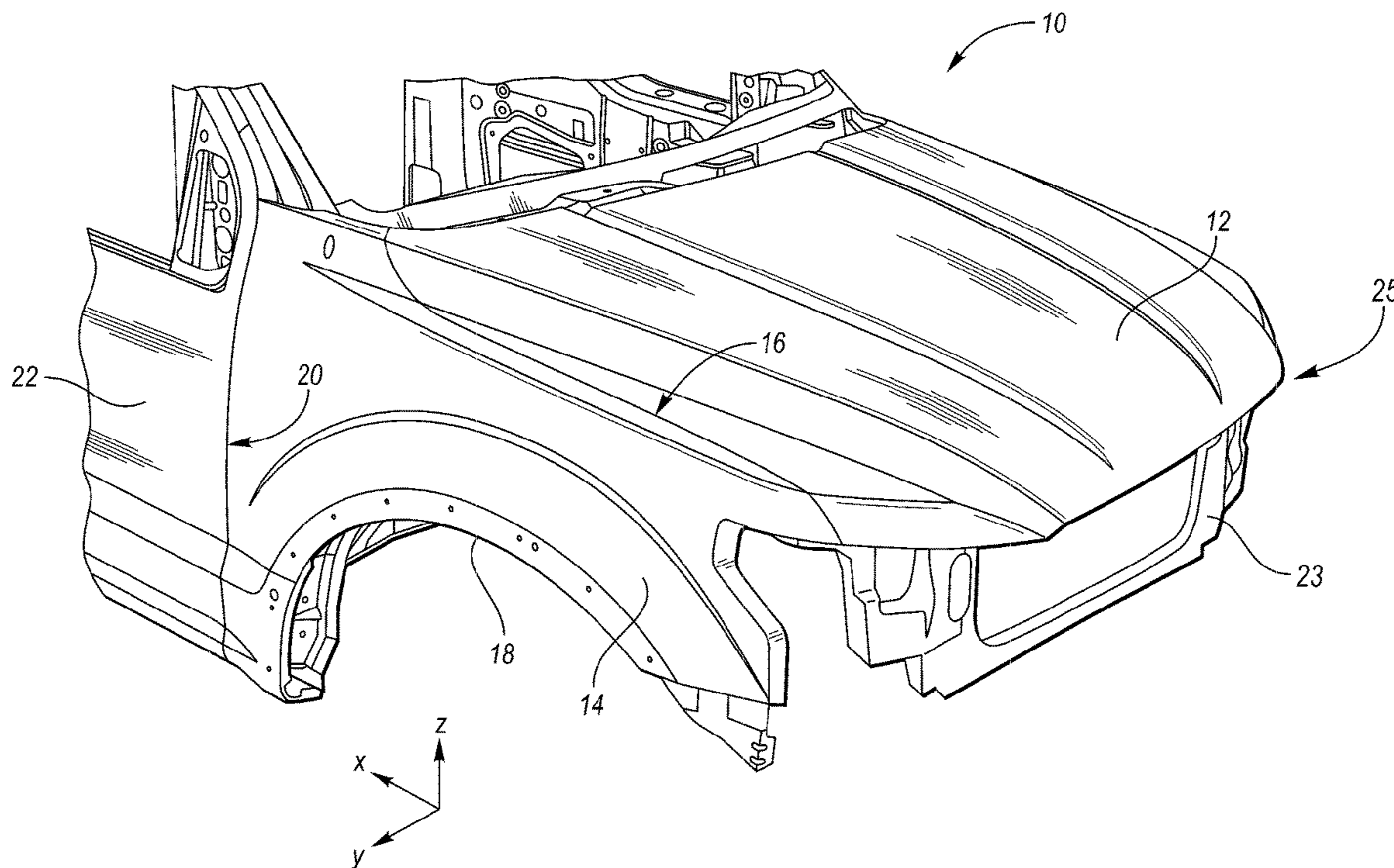
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A vehicle includes a frame and a body supported above the frame. The body includes a pair of hinge pillars disposed on opposite sides of the body and a bulkhead extending between the hinge pillars. A pair of one-piece hydroformed front-support tubes is each attached to one of the hinge pillars at a back end of the tube. Each of the tubes includes a forwardly extending portion, and a transversely extending portion attached to the frame and terminating at a front end. The front ends are attached to each other by an overlapping joint located behind a front fascia of the vehicle.

19 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



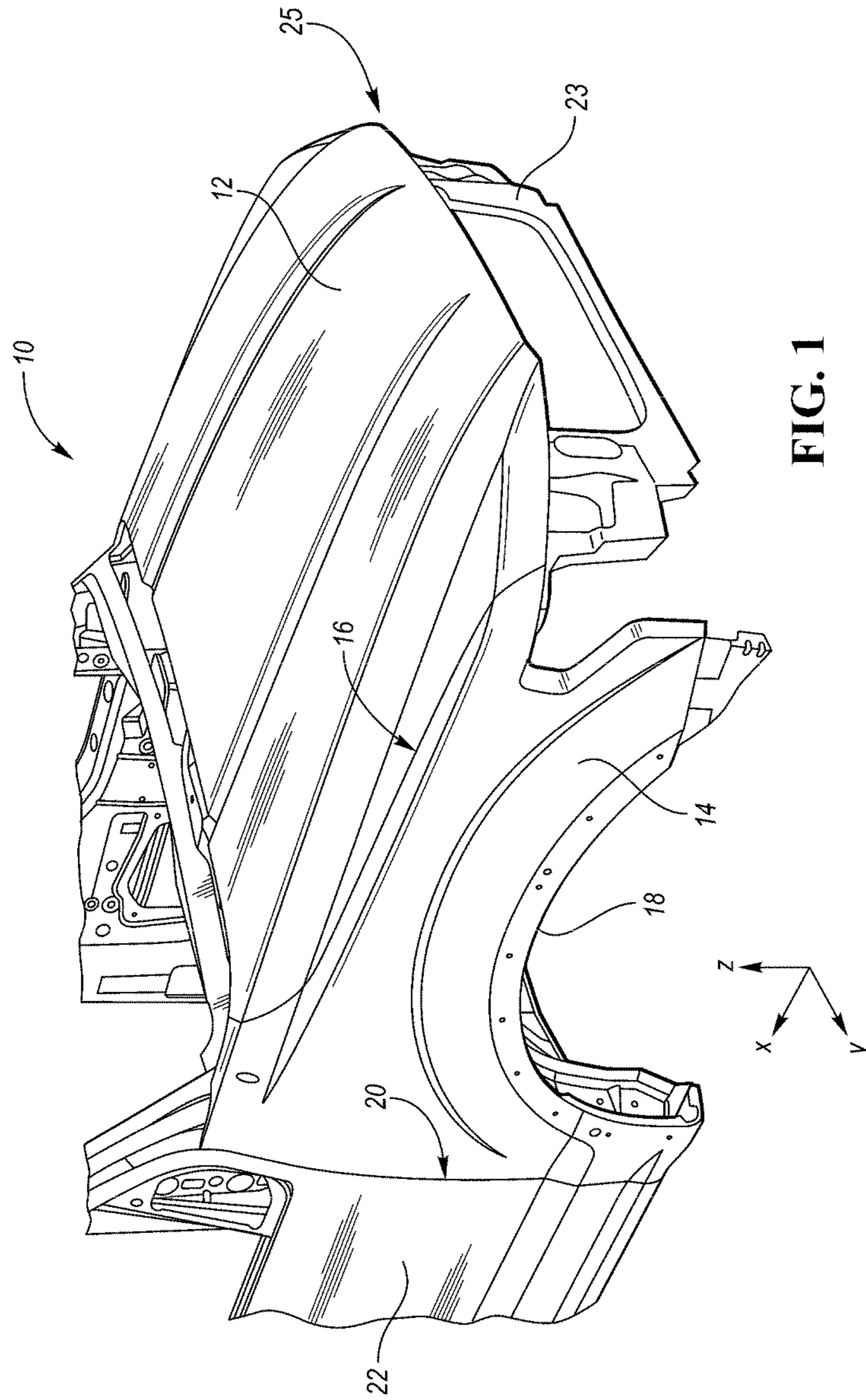
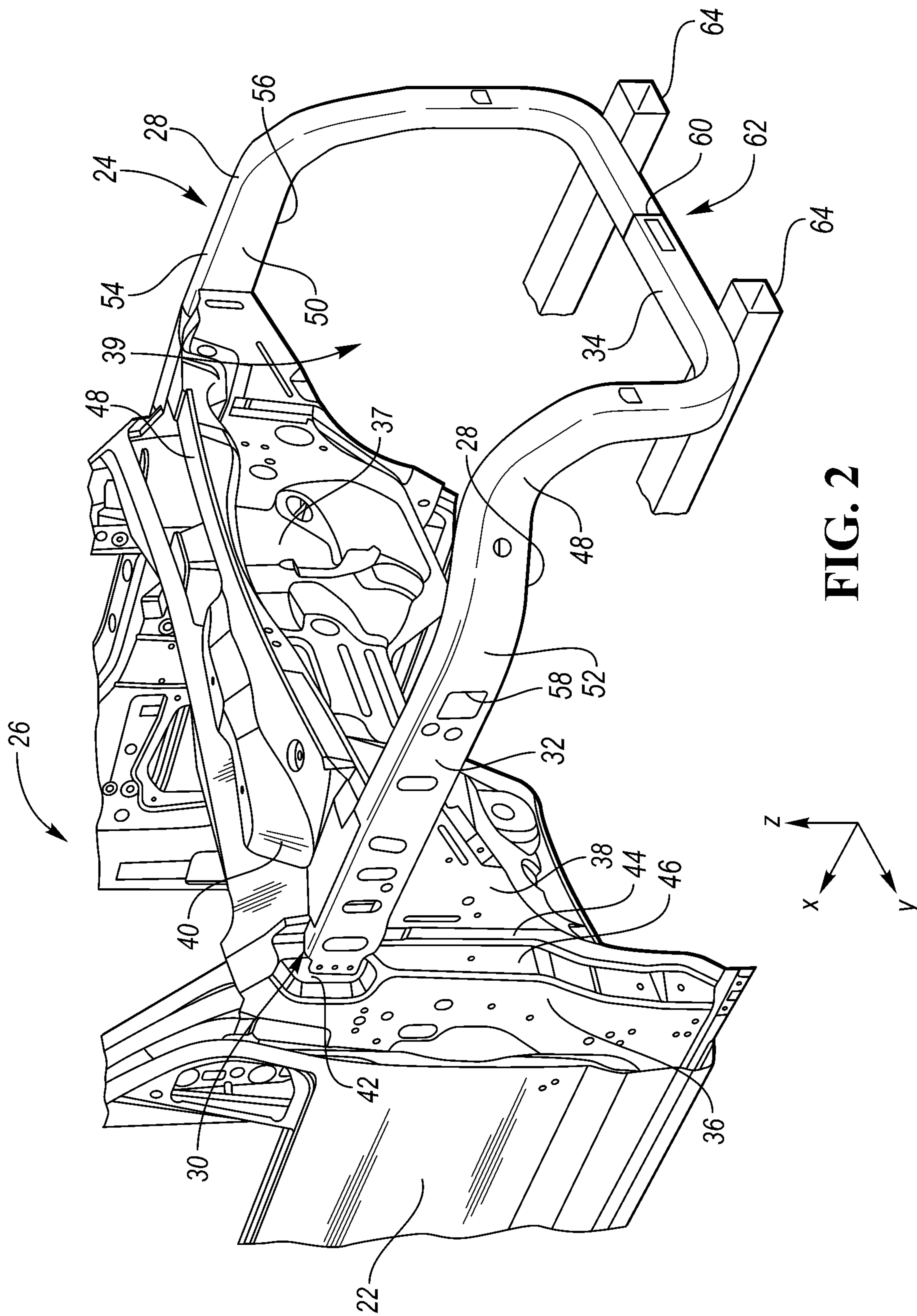


FIG. 1



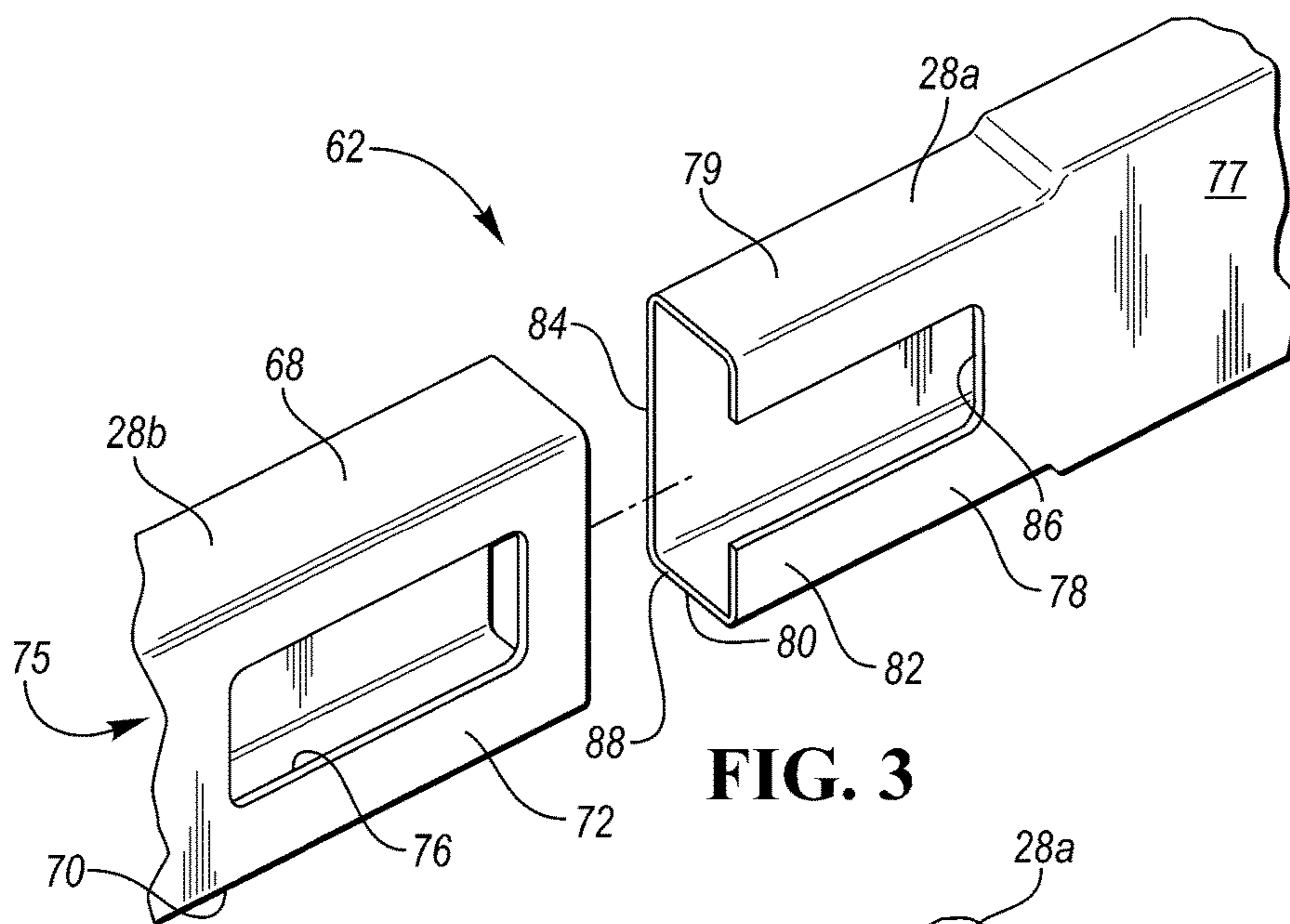


FIG. 3

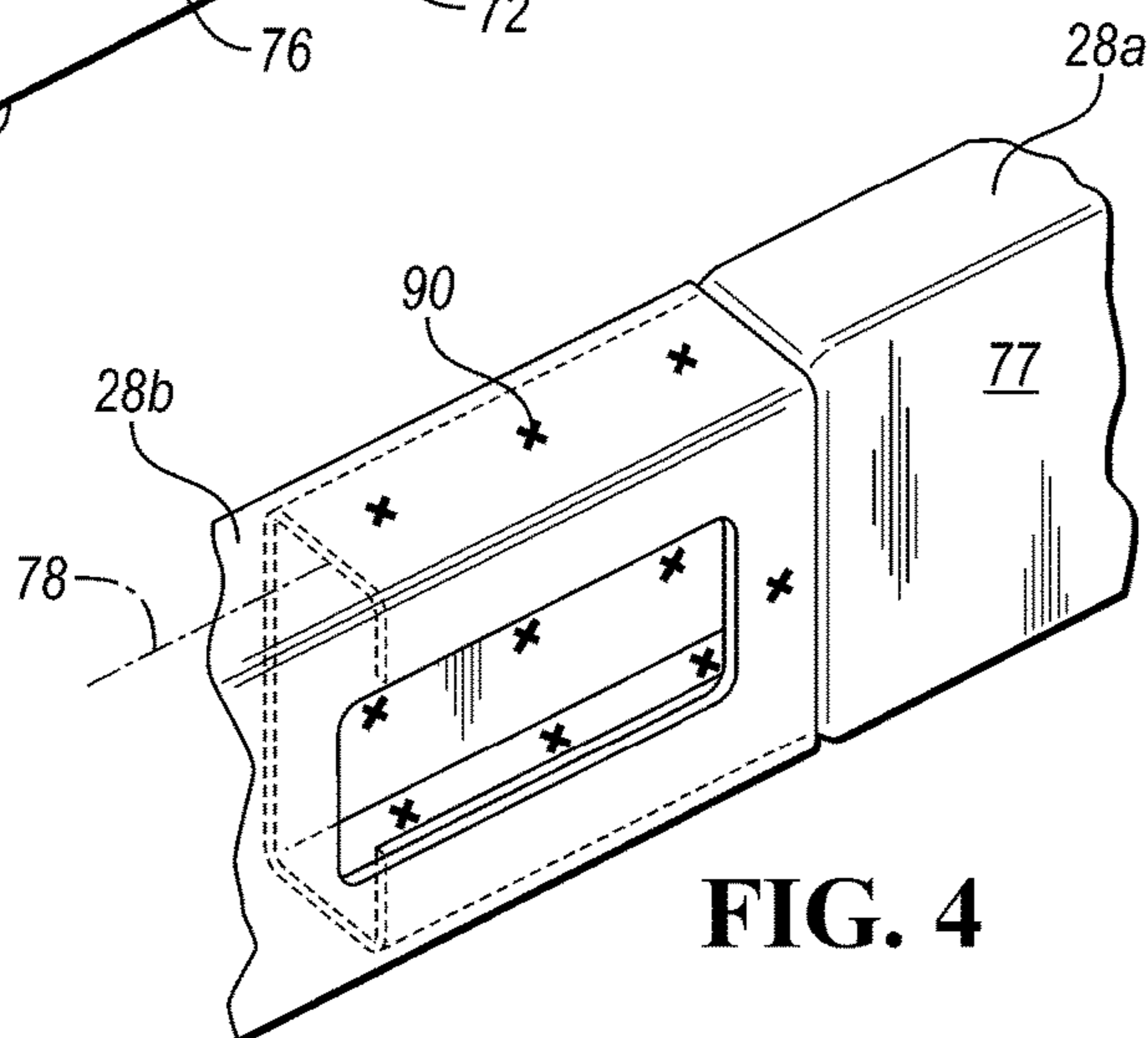


FIG. 4

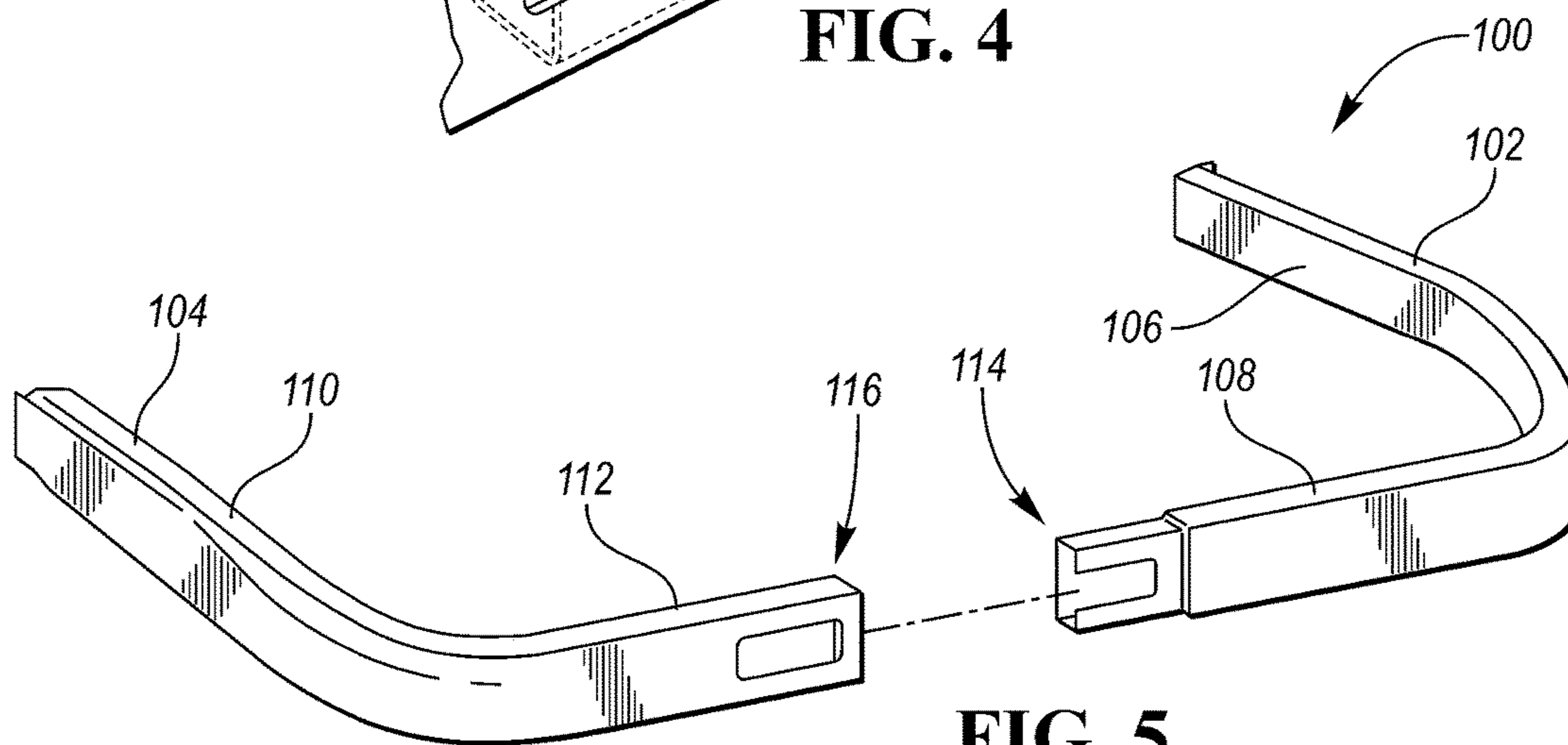


FIG. 5

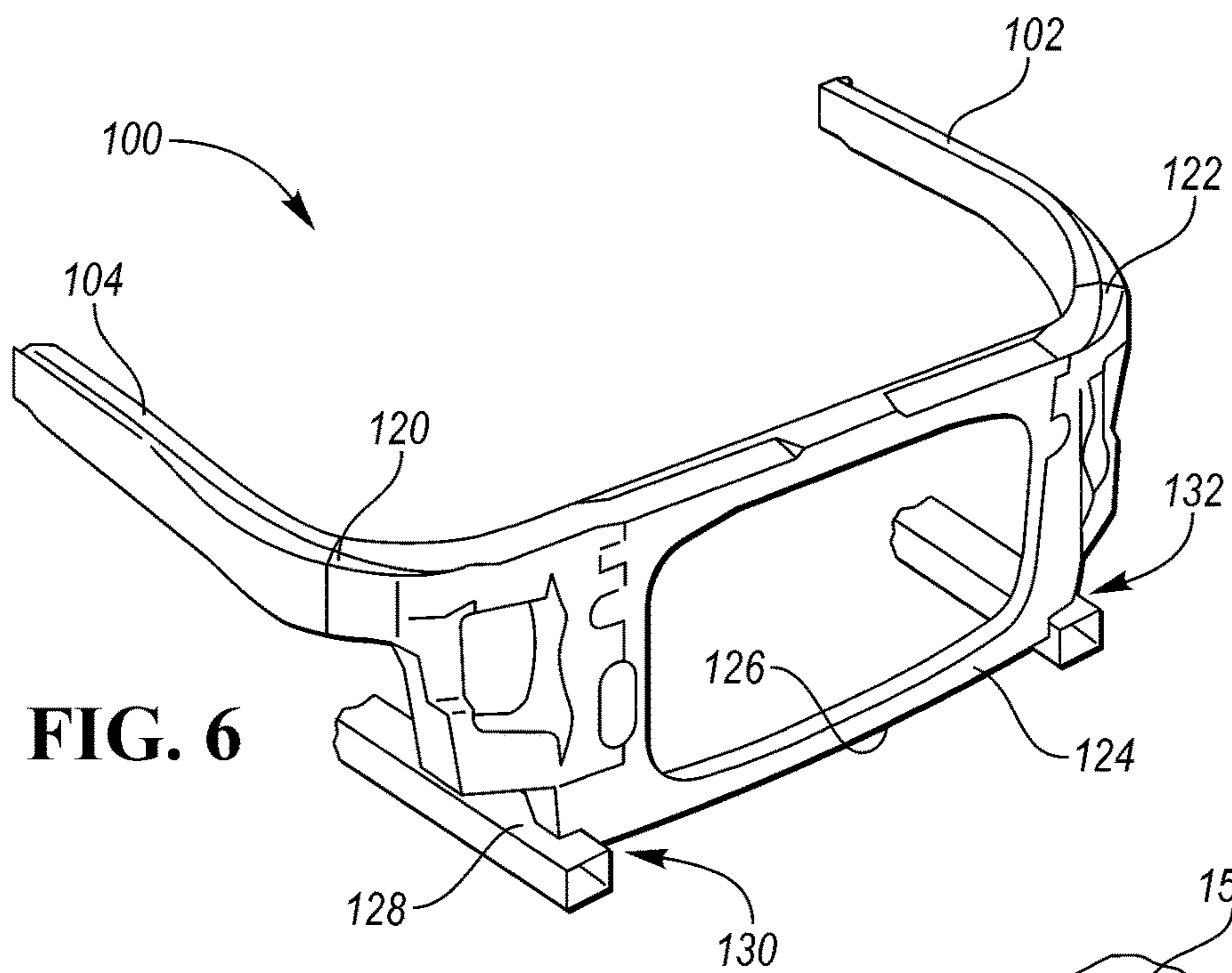


FIG. 6

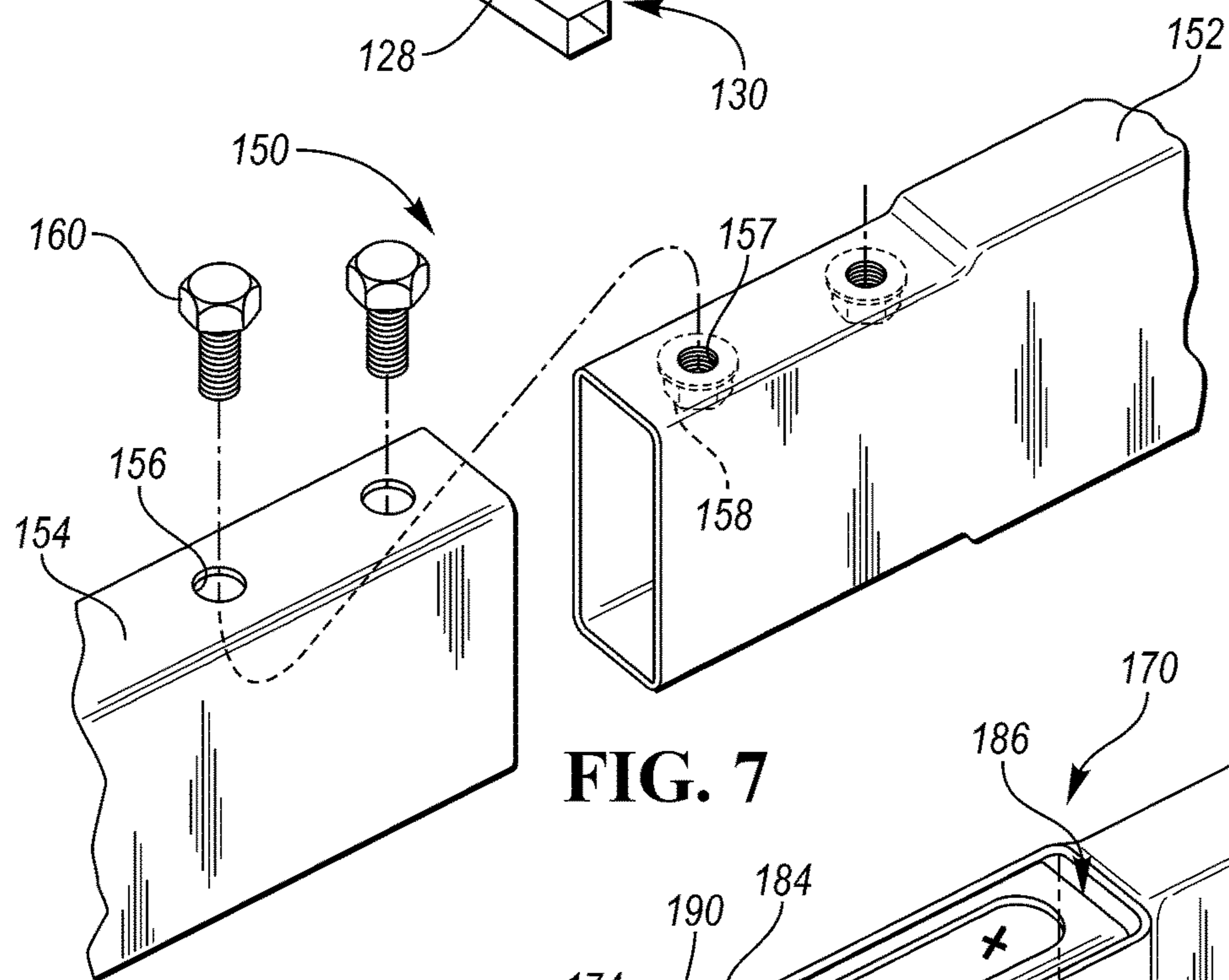


FIG. 7

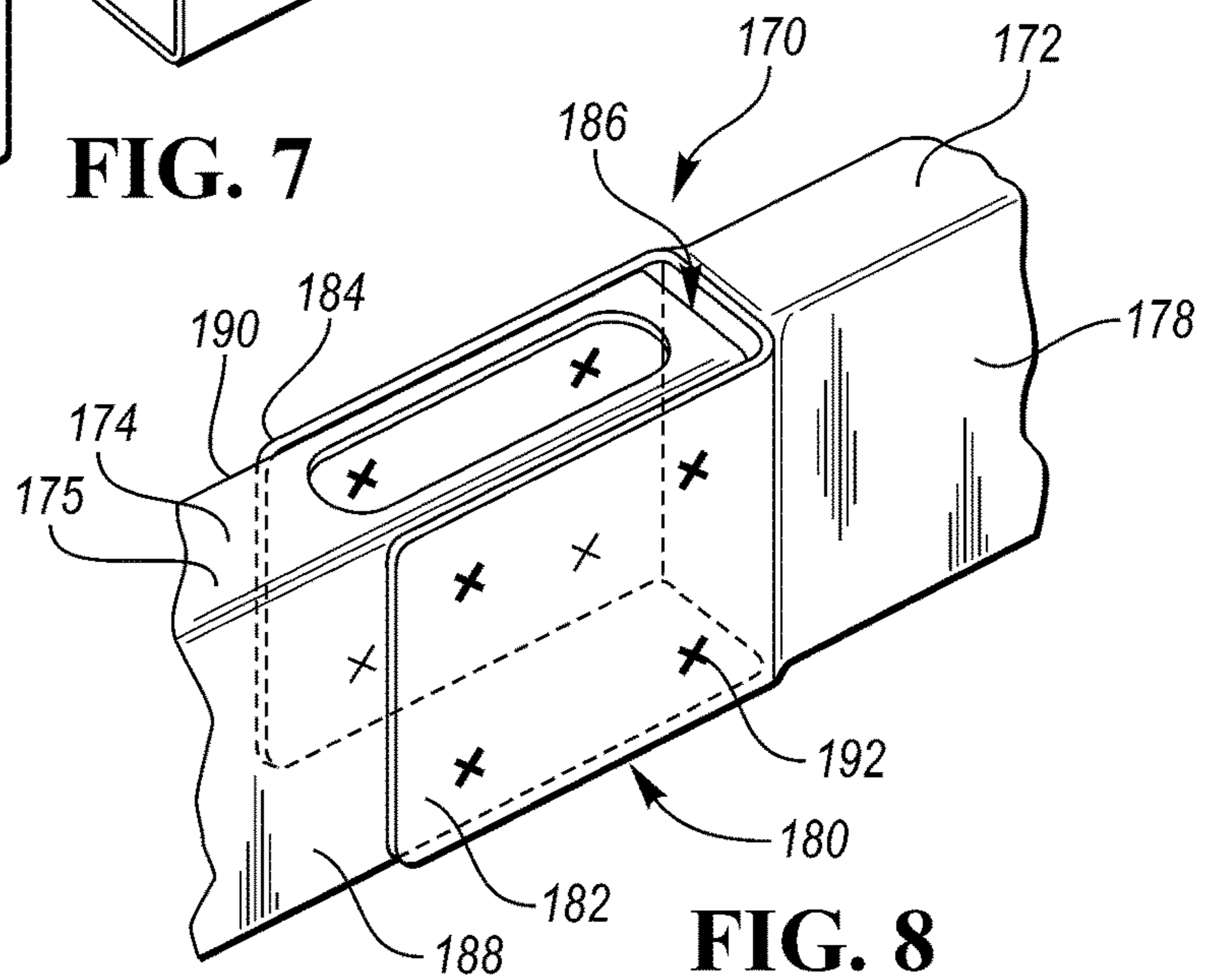


FIG. 8

1**VEHICLE BODY STRUCTURE**

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present disclosure relates to a vehicle front-end structure having a pair of fender-support tubes joined to each other at a joint.

BACKGROUND

Vehicle front-end structures provide mounting features for various vehicle components including body panels, hoods, and engine components. The front-end structure may further be utilized to manage loads from vehicle impact and other sources. Methods of joining the front-end structure using advanced lightweight materials may have an impact on vehicle performance.

SUMMARY

According to an aspect of the present disclosure, a vehicle front end includes two hinge pillars each disposed on opposite sides of the vehicle, and a pair of one-piece hydroformed tubes. Each tube includes a forwardly extending portion attached to one of the pillars and a transversely extending portion terminating at a distal end. The distal ends are attached to each other by only a single joint located in a central region of the front end.

According to another aspect of the present disclosure, a front-end structure of a vehicle includes a pair of structural members each disposed on opposite sides of the vehicle, and a pair of one-piece hydroformed fender-support tubes each attached to one of the members at a proximal end and extending forward therefrom. Each of the tubes has a longitudinally extending portion that includes the proximal end, and a transversely extending portion that curves inwardly toward a longitudinal centerline of the vehicle and terminates at a distal end. The tubes are only attached to each other at the distal ends by a single joint.

According to yet another aspect of the present disclosure, a vehicle includes a frame and a body supported above the frame. The body includes a pair of hinge pillars disposed on opposite sides of the body and a bulkhead extending between the hinge pillars. A pair of one-piece hydroformed front-support tubes is each attached to one of the hinge pillars at a back end of the tube. Each of the tubes includes a forwardly extending portion, and a transversely extending portion attached to the frame and terminating at a front end. The front ends are attached to each other by an overlapping joint located behind a front fascia of the vehicle. A bolster is connected to each of the transversely extending portions and defines a portion of the front fascia. The bulkhead, the pair of tubes and the bolster cooperate to define an engine compartment.

The above aspects of the disclosure and other aspects will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art in view of the attached drawings and the following detailed description of the illustrated embodiments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a portion of a front end of a vehicle.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the vehicle shown in FIG. 1 with many of the body panels removed to show the fender-support tubes.

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FIG. 3 is an exploded perspective view of an example joint.

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the joint of FIG. 3 assembled together.

FIG. 5 is an exploded perspective view of belt-line front-end structure.

FIG. 6 is a perspective view of the front-end structure of FIG. 5 having a bolster attached thereto.

FIG. 7 is a perspective view of another joint.

FIG. 8 is a perspective view of yet another joint.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The illustrated embodiments are disclosed with reference to the drawings. However, it is to be understood that the disclosed embodiments are intended to be merely examples that may be embodied in various and alternative forms. The figures are not necessarily to scale and some features may be exaggerated or minimized to show details of particular components. The specific structural and functional details disclosed are not to be interpreted as limiting, but as a representative basis for teaching one skilled in the art how to practice the disclosed concepts.

A common multiple axis system is used in each of the figures to indicate relative directions with respect to the vehicle. An X-axis denotes a longitudinal direction, a Y-axis denotes a lateral direction, and a Z-axis denotes a vertical direction.

Referring to FIG. 1, a front end of a vehicle 10 is depicted that supports several outer panels. A hood 12 is hinged and covers an engine compartment in a closed position. Access to the engine compartment is provided when the hood 12 is rotated to an open position. Each of a pair of fenders 14 is adjacent to the hood 12 on either side. The fenders 14 are fixed and create a margin gap 16 to the hood 12. The fenders 14 also create an interface to a front wheel well 18 at a lower portion. At a rear portion, the fenders 14 create a margin gap 20 to a side door 22. The fenders 14 and the hood 12 require sufficient underlying front-end structure in order to maintain proper fit relative to each other, as well as operability. A bolster 23 is disposed at the front of the vehicle 10 and forms the main structural support of the front fascia 25. The bolster 23 may support the radiator, the hood, the headlights, the fan, the grille, and other components.

Referring to FIG. 2, a front-end structure 24 of the vehicle 10 is shown with the body panels removed. The front-end structure 24 extends forward from a passenger cabin 26. The cabin 26 includes hinge pillars 36 and cowl-side panels 38 on each side of the vehicle. A bulkhead 37 extends between the hinge pillars 36 and defines a rear-most portion of the engine compartment 39. For each side of the vehicle, the cowl-side panel 38 defines a first vertical and longitudinal plane that is in the X-Z plane. The hinge pillar 36 may be connected to the rear portion of the cowl-side panel 38 at a flange 44. The flange 44 is also in the X-Z plane. The hinge pillar 36 and the cowl-side panel 38 may be attached by rivets, bolts, screws, adhesive or welding. In one embodiment, the hinge pillar 36 and cowl-side panel 38 are aluminum alloy and are fastened together with rivets. The hinge pillar 36 may include a stepped surface 42 defining a second vertical and longitudinal plane that is in the X-Z plane. The second plane is offset rearward and outward relative to the first plane. The stepped surface 42 is offset laterally outward from the flange 44 in the Y direction. A laterally extending step 46 interconnects the stepped surface 42 and the flange 44 providing a continuous surface transition.

The front-end structure **24** provides mounting support for the hood **12**, fenders **14**, the bolster **23**, and other front-end components. The front-end structure **24** includes a pair of front-fender support tubes **28** (also known as shotgun tubes) that extend longitudinally forward from the passenger cabin **26**. The tubes **28** may be formed as a hollow structure. The pair of tubes **28** may be a mirror image of each other except at the distal end. In one embodiment, each of the tubes **28** is hydroformed as a single piece. The tubes **28** may be made of aluminum alloy (such as 6011-T4), steel, magnesium alloy, titanium alloy, polymers, composite materials, and the like. The wall thickness of the tube may be about 2 mm to 5 mm.

Each tube **28** includes a forwardly extending portion **32** having a proximal end **30** that may interface with the hinge pillar **36**. The forwardly extending portion **32** generally extends in the X-direction. The forwardly extending portion **32** may also interface with the cowl side **38**. For example, the forwardly extending portion **32** may include an inner sidewall **50** and an outer sidewall **52** that is opposite the inner sidewall. The tube **28** also includes an upper sidewall **54** and a lower sidewall **56** along portions of the tube **28**. The sidewalls cooperate to define a tubular structure that defines an interior cavity. At the proximal end **30**, the tube **28** may only include the opposing inner and outer sidewalls **50**, **52**. The inner and outer sidewalls extend away from the tubular portion of the tube **28** to match the shape of the hinge pillar **36**. The width of the laterally extending step **46** corresponds to the width of the tube **28**. The hinge pillar **36** and cowl-side panel **38** cooperate with the tube **28** and allow the tube to nest with the hinge pillar **36** and the cowl-side panel **38**. The outer sidewall **52** may be attached to the hinge pillar **36** and the inner sidewall **50** may be attached to the cowl side **38**. Each tube **28** also includes a plurality of access holes **58** cut into the outer sidewall **52**. The access holes allow fasteners and tools to access the inner sidewall **50** for attachment of the inner sidewall to the cowl-side panel **38** and hinge pillar **36**.

A cowl top **40** is disposed on top of the tubes **28** and the HVAC plenum **49**. The cowl top **40** is attached to the upper sidewall **54** of each tube **28** and spans between the pair of tubes **28** to provide additional lateral support to the front-end structure **24**. Hood mounts (not shown) are disposed on the cowl top **40** and are fastened to the upper sidewall **54**. The top fasteners may be rivets, bolts or screws. The top fasteners are installed on the vehicle from the outside of the vehicle and are fully serviceable from the outside of the vehicle.

The forwardly extending portion **32** is substantially straight (in the X-direction) over all or most of its length. The straight portion may have a uniform cross-sectional shape reducing tooling needed to impart more complex formations and bends on the tube **28**. The straight portion of the tube **28** also allows for more direct load transfer and increased part stiffness.

Each tube **28** also includes a transversely extending portion **34** that is connected to the forwardly extending portion **32** by an intermediate portion **48**. In one embodiment, the portions **32**, **34**, and **48**, are integrally formed as a single hydroformed piece. The transversely extending portion **34** may be at a lower height (in the Y-direction) than the forwardly extending portion **32**. The transversely extending portion **34** generally extends in the Y-direction. The distal ends **60** of each of the tubes **28** are connected to each other at a joint **62** that is located in a central region of the front end. The central region is defined between the frame rails. In one embodiment, the joint **62** is laterally

located on or near (within 30 cm) the longitudinal centerline of the vehicle **10**. Each of the transversely extending portions **34** are connected to a corresponding one of the frame rails **64**. The intermediate portions **48** and the transversely extending portions **34** cooperate to define a framing for the bolster **23**, which is a substructure of the front fascia.

In many prior art solutions, the shotgun tubes are not directly connected to each other at a single joint as proposed in the illustrated example of FIG. **2**. Instead, a cross member may connect the shotgun tubes. This requires at least two joints and at least one additional component, which can increase cost and assembly time. Hydroforming allows the shotgun tubes to have more complex geometries—such as the forwardly extending portions and the transversely extending portion disclosed above—without high economical costs. As such, the tubes may be formed to curve toward each other to allow direct connection via a single joint as shown in FIG. **2**.

Referring to FIGS. **3** and **4**, the joint **62** may be a glove joint in which a portion of the driver-side tube **28a** is telescopically disposed within a portion of the passenger-side tube **28b**. The passenger-side tube **28b** may include top side **68**, a bottom side **70**, front side **72**, and a back side that cooperate to define a rectangular box structure having an interior **75**. The driver-side tube **28a** includes a main portion **77**, and an insertion portion **78** having a diameter that is smaller than the main portion **77**. The insertion portion **78** is sized and shaped to be telescopically received within the interior **75**. The insertion portion **78** includes a top surface **79**, a bottom surface **80**, a front surface **82**, and a back surface **84** that are each disposed against an inside surface of a corresponding side of the passenger-side tube **28b** when the joint is assembled. Each of the tubes may define a cutout **76**, **86** that allows access to the interiors of the tubes for attachment of the tubes. In the illustrated example, cutout **76** is defined in the front **72** of the passenger-side tube, and cutout **86** is defined in the front surface **82** of the driver-side tube. The cutout **86** may be a slot that extends from a terminus **88** of the tube **28a**. In other embodiments, the cutouts may be on another side of the tube such as the top, bottom or back. When the tubes are fully seated, the cutouts are aligned allowing access into the interiors of the tubes. The glove joint **62** may be secured by spot welds **90**, or by other attachment means known, such as fasteners.

Referring to FIGS. **5** and **6**, a belt-line front-end structure **100** includes a driver-side fender-support tube **102** having a forwardly extending portion **106** and a transversely extending portion **108** that terminates at a distal end **114**. The structure **100** also includes a passenger-side fender-support tube **104** having a forwardly extending portion **110** and a transversely extending portion **112** that terminates at a distal end **116**. Unlike tubes **28**, the forwardly extending portion **106** and the transversely extending portion **108** of the belt-line structure **100** lie at the substantially same height. The tubes **102**, **104** may be connected to each other via a glove joint in which the distal end **114** is received within the distal end **116**. Similar to the front-end structure **24**, the front-end structure **100** may be connected to the hinge pillars **36** and the cowls sides **38** as shown in FIG. **2** and described in the associated text.

The front-end structure **100** also includes a bolster **124** that is connected to the tubes **102**, **104** at least at joint **120** and joint **122** that are located on an upper side of the bolster. A lower side **126** of the bolster **124** is connected to each of the frame rails **128** at joint **130** and joint **132**.

FIG. **7** illustrates a glove joint **150** according an alternative embodiment. The joint **150** is a glove joint in which the

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driver-side tube **152** is telescopically received within the passenger-side tube **154**. The tubes **152**, **154** may be secured together via fasteners **160** that extend through the tops of the tubes. Of course, the fasteners could be disposed on another surface of the tubes. The tube **154** may define holes **156** that align with holes **157** defined in the tube **152** when the tubes are inserted into each other. A weld nut **158** is secured to an inside surface of the tube **152** such that it is aligned with the holes **157**. The fasteners **160** extend through the holes **156**, **157** and threadably engage the weld nuts **158**. While FIG. 7 illustrates bolts securing the joint **150**, other types of joining are contemplated by this disclosure: including screws, rivets, clinch joints, adhesives, and welding.

FIG. 8 illustrates a closed-box joint **170** according to yet another embodiment. The joint **170** joints the driver-side tube **172** to the passenger-side tube **174**. The tube **174** may be a closed-box structure having a top **175**, a bottom, a front **188**, and a back **190**. The top **175** may define an access hole **176**. The tube **172** may include a main portion **178** having a closed-box structure and an attachment portion **180** that only includes a front wall **182** and a back wall **184**. The walls **182** and **184** are spaced apart to define a receiving area **186**. The joint **170** is assembled by inserting the distal end of the tube **174** into the receiving area **186** such that the wall **182** is disposed against the front **188** and the wall **184** is disposed against the back **190**. The tubes may be secured by welds **192** on the walls **182** and **184**. Of course, the joint **170** may use fasteners, clinch joints, rivets, or other securing means instead of welding.

The embodiments described above are specific examples that do not describe all possible forms of the disclosure. The features of the illustrated embodiments may be combined to form further embodiments of the disclosed concepts. The words used in the specification are words of description rather than limitation. The scope of the following claims is broader than the specifically disclosed embodiments and also includes modifications of the illustrated embodiments.

What is claimed is:

1. A vehicle front end comprising:
two hinge pillars each disposed on opposite sides of the vehicle; and
a pair of one-piece hydroformed tubes each including a forwardly extending portion attached to one of the pillars, and a transversely extending portion terminating at a distal end, wherein the distal ends are attached to each other by only a single joint located in a central region of the front end.
2. The front end of claim 1, wherein the joint is laterally located within 20 centimeters of a longitudinal centerline of the vehicle.
3. The front end of claim 1, wherein the distal ends are sized such that one of the distal ends is telescopically disposed within the other of the distal ends at the joint.
4. The front end of claim 3, wherein the each of the distal ends defines a cutout arranged such that interiors of the tubes are accessible via the cutouts when the joint is formed.
5. The front end of claim 1, wherein the transversely extending portion is located at a lower height than the forwardly extending portion.
6. The front end of claim 1, wherein each of the tubes, at the distal ends, is a closed-box section having four sides.

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7. The front end of claim 1, wherein each of the transversely extending portions are attached to a frame of the vehicle.

8. The front end of claim 1, wherein the distal ends are welded to each other at the joint.

9. The front end of claim 1, wherein the transversely extending portions are attached to a bolster of the vehicle.

10. A front-end structure of a vehicle comprising:
a pair of structural members each disposed on opposite sides of the vehicle; and
a pair of one-piece hydroformed fender-support tubes each attached to one of the members at a proximal end and extending forward therefrom, each of the tubes having a longitudinally extending portion that includes the proximal end, and a transversely extending portion that curves inwardly toward a longitudinal centerline of the vehicle and terminates at a distal end, wherein the tubes are only attached to each other at the distal ends by a single joint.

11. The front-end structure of claim 10 further comprising a bolster connected to each of the transversely extending portions to define a portion of a front fascia of the vehicle, and wherein the joint is disposed behind the bolster.

12. The front-end structure of claim 10, wherein the distal ends are sized such that one of the distal ends is telescopically disposed within the other of the distal ends at the joint.

13. The front-end structure of claim 12, wherein the each of the distal ends defines a cutout that is arranged such that interiors of the tubes are accessible via the cutouts when the joint is formed.

14. The front-end structure of claim 10, wherein, for each of the tubes, the distal end is located at a height that is lower than the proximal end.

15. A vehicle comprising:
a frame;
a body supported above the frame and including a pair of hinge pillars disposed on opposite sides of the body and a bulkhead extending between the hinge pillars;
a pair of one-piece hydroformed front-support tubes each attached to one of the pillars at a back end of the tube, each of the tubes including a forwardly extending portion, and a transversely extending portion attached to the frame and terminating at a front end, wherein the front ends are attached to each other by an overlapping joint located behind a front fascia of the vehicle; and
a bolster connected to each of the transversely extending portions and defining a portion of the front fascia, wherein the bulkhead, the pair of tubes and the bolster cooperate to define an engine compartment.

16. The vehicle of claim 15 further comprising a pair of cowl sides each attached to a forward portion of the hinge pillar, wherein each of the tubes are attached to a corresponding one of the cowl sides.

17. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the joint is located within 20 centimeters of a longitudinal centerline of the vehicle.

18. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the tubes are only connected to each other at the joint.

19. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the joint is disposed below a grille opening of the front fascia.

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